Times Are Strange, Baby (But So Are We)

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Times Are Strange, Baby (But So Are We)

by apollofizz

Summary

A ragged breath is what Spamton awoke to. Ragged breathing, and the stark white of a hospital room. And the promise of a man he'd once known.

Samson G. Spamton has been missing for ten years and four months. Tenna has been grieving a man not dead for ten years and four months. So what happens when Spamton shows up, alive and in a hospital, all the way across the country? Well, you fly across the country to go and see him, even if that means facing emotions you thought you'd lost all of those years ago.

AKA Spamtenna Human AU!!!!!!!!!!

Title is from Great God Grove!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

- Inspired by [Restricted Work] by darlathecyborgpluviophile

Chapter 1: Mail Call

A ragged breath is what Spamton awoke to. Ragged breathing. His own ragged breathing, he realised, after the shake he can feel settled like a jagged piece of glass in his lungs. His chest rattles like a car engine as he frantically pulled in oxygen, panic squirming in his gut as the feeling of suffocation threatens to take over. He– He can't pull in air– Not enough, at least– And *god*, it burned. *Why did it burn? Why did it all hurt??*

Spamton couldn't gather enough thought to orient himself when someone jostled him. He didn't think to open his eyes yet. He prefers the safety of darkness.

Someone grabbed his arm–a touch he would later remember as gentle, and not at all a threat– causing him to lash out aggressively, but instead of hitting his supposed "attacker", his hand made contact with a wall. The pain didn't phase him, he was too focused on the burning in his lungs and stomach. There was too much pain everywhere else that the feeling in his limbs were muted and numb. In response, his shaky, calloused hands squeezed tightly around whatever they could touch. He vaguely recognised a sense of tightness around his head, and realised his hands were tugging at his scraggly, unwashed hair.

The person nearby tugged at his wrists gently, and Spamton resisted. No– No, no, no *nonononononno*– It was the strings all over again– He– He wasn't free– He would never be free–

Ringing.

Ringing.

A phone. He could hear it, loud in his mind. Taunting him. Haunting him. Mocking him.

Where was it?? Where was the ringing??

Spamton searched frantically, eyes opening harshly to the–

The sterile white of a room?

No– Where was–

He'd been–

Spamton barely had time to react before he's hunched, stomach sore and throat raw. Someone touched his back. Spamton didn't have the energy to flinch away. He was vaguely aware of someone forcing a glass into his hands, and he was vaguely aware of his vision clearing ever so slightly, but he was too drained and out of it to notice.

He took a sip from the glass. The water tasted like ice and dust. It felt like freedom. The phone was still ringing.

Spam, or rather, *Samson*, finally took the time to vaguely process the past few hours. What the hell had happened??

Oh, yeah. Play stupid games, win stupid prizes. Probably something to do with his broken mind. Just another consequence of his idiotic actions.

Granted, some of those actions hadn't been his. He hadn't decided a stage light would fall. He hadn't decided to get kicked out. Hell, he certainly hadn't decided to be so caught up in the ringing that he was hardly able to tell what was real and what was fake any more.

So… He was in some kind of hospital? Why? How?? It wasn't like people tended to care for those they thought were lesser than them. Like him. And it wasn't like he could afford it.

Someone entered the room. Spamton didn't even notice anyone leaving. Probably on account of the fact that his vision was doubled and hazy, and he'd been too clouded by the ringing to hear anything else. Where were his glasses?? His vision had been awful since he awoke, and

the comforting feeling of cold metal against his face was sorely missed. As was… just generally being able to see.

Being confused and disorientated in a world that hated him was scary. It was terrifying. His paranoia, almost always at a solid six, was currently much, much higher considering he could barely see. His head swam and his body ached. Something crunched in his wrist as he moved his hand to touch his jaw, and his other arm felt restricted by something. Wires, most likely.

He hoped.

Not strings. Wires.

It was the only reassurance he could give himself.

Samson G. Spamton, more commonly known as Spam or Spamton to those he knew, wasn't new to waking up in strange places. Having an episode and waking up with strange injuries was just a hazard of his life. Ever since his life fell apart, broken bones, scars, and weird bruises felt like a close friend he wished would leave. But… He oddly found a sense of comfort in the pain.

"Samson," A voice spoke to his left. Spamton looked over with narrowed eyes. "Glad to see you've regained some awareness. Do you know where you are?"

Spam blinked a few times, trying–and failing–to adjust to the harsh environment. Safe to say, no, he didn't know where he was. Instead of trying to use his sore voice and rattling lungs, Spamton shook his head in response. He turned his vision away from the light and vaguely person-shaped shadow to his left, and instead focused on his knees.

"Here." The person spoke, approaching with quiet footsteps, "Your glasses. My apologies that you weren't given them sooner."

Spamton snatched the lenses like they would be taken again in still-shaking hands, haphazardly putting them on his face with some difficulty. He almost poked himself in the eye in the process, but as soon as the frames were sat somewhat comfortably on his face, he could see much clearer. It wasn't magic. It didn't clear all of the fog, but the blurriness went away, and so did a headache he had only just recognised, to some degree. It was much more obvious now that this was, in fact, a hospital.

The person to Spamton's left continued talking, but he wasn't listening. The ringing was back. It was quiet, in the background, but still there. Ever present, like the tugging of strings against his joints. He was never free of it. It could quieten–cease its constant nagging as a whisper in the background of his mind–but it never truly left. It was always waiting. Haunting him like a silent ghost.

Spam didn't even realise he'd been listening to the ringing so intensely, until he felt warm blood against the side of his head from where his nails had been digging into his ears. He felt his chest rattle and shake as he hyperventilated again. He heard a voice beside him try to calm him down. He felt a hand on his wrist, and this time, he didn't have the strength to lash out.

He had to get out. He had to pick up the phone. He couldn't miss it again. Where was it? Where– Where was the ringing coming from?? He needed– He had to–

"Samson?"

Spam looked up. The ringing was loud in his mind. The doctor had a cold, uncaring expression. Spamton found that he was unsurprised.

"Samson, there's no phone here."

Ugh, Spamton was remembering why he had avoided the doctors for so long. Spamton tried to open his mouth to respond, but instead, a heavy, aching cough rattled his entire body. It sounded horrific, like a chainsaw in his chest. He recovered soon enough, with a dry swallow and a shaky, deep breath. That cough was another byproduct of his terrible choices, and he was, unfortunately, very used to it.

“Look,” The voice spoke after Spamton had regained his “composure”, “ we can’t keep you here much longer, considering that physically, you’re fine.” Oh, how Spamton wished that was true, “But we’ve called your emergency contact. He’s in the waiting room now.”

…What? He still had an emergency contact? He thought he had changed when he’d left??

Was… Was *he* here?

Had he… Did he care…?

“I’ll tell him you’re awake and… mostly sound. And I’ll get someone in here to discharge you.”

“W-W-Wait–” Spamton managed, but the person had already left. Curse his stutter.

It was a long wait, waiting to see where they were keeping him. Where they were keeping his Spamton. Formally, Samson G. Spamton, but anyone who spoke to him longer than five seconds knew the former mailman preferred to be addressed by his last name. It wasn’t a need for respect, or some kind of power trip, he just hated his first name, and refused to disclose his middle name. He’d always insisted it gave him an air of mystery. Ant always called it pretentious.

Anthony Tenna was, at heart, a hopeful man. He ran a TV show for kids, for crying out loud! He had to hold on to some sense of optimism, lest his child-friendly aura of happiness be called an illusion. He had to hold onto hope, even in the bleakest of times. But this? This was where hope died. This was where his misguided hopes were put to the test. Where he was proven wrong, as he had been for so many years.

Ant knew what his friends would say. They were always his sense of… well, *sense*.

Ramb would lecture him on being too optimistic and getting burned. Elnina would gently remind him of all of the other times he'd hoped he would find Spamton. Lanino would back his lover, with more solutions to distract. Mike… Mike would see sense. Mike would tell him he understood, but he'd remind Ant to see sense. He'd moved on, along with TV Time. It was different now. *He* was different.

But… Well, this could be his *chance*! Yes, Ant knew how he sounded. An overly optimistic old man with the hopes of reuniting with a lost friend, a dream, at best. A hopeless fantasy. This was probably a prank of some kind, or they'd gotten the name wrong, or he'd already left, or–

Why was he even in this waiting room? What was even the point? Sitting here on uncomfortable chairs, staring at posters for health issues that sounded made up. He flicked through a magazine a few times, skimming the contents idly until he got more bored than anxious. And Ant really *was* anxious. He didn't even know why! He should be angry! He should be furious! Spam doesn't write or call, or hell, even send one of those e-mail things he loves so much!! And he finally, *finally* shows up, and it's in the hospital after a good Samaritan found him on the *street*?! He wasn't even in the same state any more! Ant had been made to *fly* from California, where his darling studio was, all the way to New York, all because of the *possibility* that Spamton was here.

Ant, frustrated and starting to second guess himself, got up to go, brushing his lap off and making sure he had all of his things, before a voice stopped him.

"Mr. Tenna?"

Tenna tensed, shoulders hunched, before he took a deep breath, put on an award-winning gentle smile, and spun on his heels to face whoever had said his name.

"He's ready for you."

Chapter 2: Counting

Chapter Summary

Spamton and Tenna talk.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tenna remembered how Spamton had run in, as though he were being chased.

"Spam! Are you alright? What's got you in such a–"

"G-Gotta run, T-T-Tens." Spam stuttered, giving the other a half-hearted, not at all reassuring smile, "I– I'll let you know w-when I'll be b-back, but fo-for now, c-consider this m-m-my notice of le-leave."

Ant recalled never seeing Spam's stutter this bad. He knew Spam had a stutter, he spent the most amount of time around the salesman! But it was only close to this bad if Spam had had a long day, or if he was particularly emotional in any sense. Spam sounded downright ***terrified****.*

Ant would later curse himself for not noticing the signs.

Spamton disappeared a few weeks later, with a messily written note and a stain on the corner that had looked suspiciously like ***blood****.*

Spamton pulled his ragged blazer around him tighter than necessary, catching the dirty white turtleneck underneath. The action pulled holes into the already-frayed wool. Spam didn't seem to care. His head was pounding now, and whilst the ache of hunger after his appetite

had returned had been quenched by bland hospital food, he still felt the lingering bite of starvation that followed him wherever he went. It wasn't easy to find food when you didn't exactly look the most trustworthy.

Spamton's bad eyesight had stopped doubling now, and his head had stopped swimming. He could still faintly hear the ringing of a phone, but it felt distant. Like the phone wasn't meant for him. He couldn't feel the strings any more. Even as bandages threatened to cut off circulation to his hand, they didn't feel like the strings from before. It was… concerning. Like he was waiting for a rug to be pulled out from under him.

Spam was just waiting, now. Waiting to see if his deepest wishes–what he'd prayed for for *years*–had finally come true. He'd wanted to go back. He'd wanted to return home since he left! But he couldn't exactly tell Tenna that!

Tenna… Not Anthony, not Ant, but… Tenna. His last name. A mockery of the fact that he himself preferred to be called Spam or Spamton over his first or middle name. It was a secret running joke of theirs. They always used to love how it would puzzle and confuse people. People would always assume they were being professional and formal, but under that mask, they were sniping and joking, teasing about preferences and secretly coming up with nicknames to use once they were alone. It was sweet. Soft. Nostalgic.

It felt like a dagger in his chest.

The room that he was waiting in was stark and sterile, with an uncomfortable bed and a window that faced a dying courtyard. The lights were switched off, allowing the slits of grey sun to filter in miserably from outside. It was beginning to rain. He could hear the patter of drops against the window over the sound of the ringing. It was comforting, in a sense.

The bed he was sitting on had a cushion, a flimsy cotton sheet, and stains from where he had bled onto it earlier. He knew the reason he was alone right now, and the reason he was being discharged so quickly, wasn't just because he had no insurance and was broke. No, it was also because they assumed this was some kind of drug-induced haze, and despite the agony that tended to wrack his thin frame, they automatically assumed he was just here for drugs. His next hit.

God, Spamton wished he was just in it for drugs.

Spam felt along his arms with hands numb with cold and fear and tried to not wince. The scars were a comfort, but the new ones, and the evidently broken bone in his wrist that was not-so-neatly splinted, hurt like Hell. Didn't help that every time his hands twitched, or his palm got too close to his skin, the dull sensations reminded him that he'd lost more than just his mind.

When the door eventually opened, breaking Spam free from his thoughts, the light spilled in from the corridor like an angel finally coming to save him. It hurt his eyes at first, forcing him to hold up a hand, but that didn't do much to hide him from the audible gasp. Footsteps shuffled at the doorway, and a nurse murmured something to whoever was standing there. Spamton swallowed dryly. Whoever was at the door took a step forward. Spam lowered his hand…

And immediately froze.

Tenna was here.

Tenna.

Here.

To save him.

He looked tired, like he had been travelling. Or worrying. Or both. Spamton didn't want Tenna to worry about him. He wasn't worth worrying over. Tenna looked older, too. White streaked his small afro, lines creased his soft features, and his usual perfect posture was looking a little hunched. His glasses looked thicker, and though it was hidden by shadow, Spamton was sure he could see a glasses chain around Tenna's neck.

Tenna was still dressed to the nines, in a neat pastel cardigan, light blue floral button-up, and formal beige khakis. His shoes were the exact same pair he always used to wear on set, and it

makes Spamton faintly consider if the show was even still running. It wasn't like he had access to much television nowadays.

Tenna's expression shifted multiple times in rapid succession. First to relief and surprise, then worry, then finally, he settled on anger. *God*, Tenna was *angry* at him. Rightfully so, but still. It wasn't the reaction Spamton had always dreamed about when he thought about them reuniting. He always dreamed Tenna would wrap him in a big hug–one of his signature ones that always made him feel like he was invincible–and tell him that everything would be okay. That he didn't have to struggle anymore.

Under Tenna's glare, Spamton felt like a deer in headlights. The man he loved was looking at him like he was *wrong*. It hurt more than the pain. All he could do was blink rapidly against the harsh lights and try not to look as utterly terrified as he felt.

Tenna knew Spamton was here for a reason, but *god*, Spamton looked like crap.

Okay, maybe that was a little mean, but what else was he supposed to think?? This wasn't the man who left. This… This man was fragile and scared, with worn clothes and sunken eyes. His hair, usually so neat and pristine, was a tangled mess, the waves Spam fought so hard to keep straight ragged and free. His white turtleneck was basically *grey*, and the blazer he wore looked almost threadbare. Adding to the painful ensemble, Spamton wore thin, slightly too-small trousers, ragged socks, and shoes that looked like they'd once been nice business flats, but were now hole-y and worn. Definitely not the most practical outfit for mid-March in New York. He still had those stupid glasses, as well. The bicoloured ones Tenna always thought must be impractical, but Spamton always swore by. It was a comfort to see.

But he was so thin… and shockingly pale! Spamton was always a beautiful golden tan, like he'd been working in the sun and not been stood in a studio all day. He used to practically *glow*. But now? He was almost sickly pale, and his skin clung to his frame like he had no muscle at all. It was *scary*. Hadn't Spam left to pursue his big dream? Hadn't he fled at the prospect of achieving greatness without Tenna?? Was this what making it big looked like?

And– *God, Tenna felt sick–*

Was… Was that–? Did he–?

Spamton's hands were *littered* with scars. Scars that looked like paper cuts. Scars that looked like burns. Scars that forked like lightning, and cut off abruptly where he was *supposed* to have a finger. Because on Spam's left hand, he seemed to be *missing* his pinky finger completely, and his middle finger was partially gone, too. His other hand wasn't much better either. On his right hand, the scars forked so much and covered so much skin that it seemed as though he barely had any remaining nerves at all.

Tenna shuddered to think about what injuries Spamton had that Tenna couldn't see. Not physically hurt, his ass! Those doctors just wanted Spam out of there asap. Spam winced upon every movement, although his expression had since changed from fearful, to an attempt at a smooth smile. It looked like a grimace. It hurt, knowing this is what had become of the man Tenna had once loved so dearly.

Tenna so desperately wanted answers as to why he wasn't with his new Big Shot life. He wanted answers on why Spamton was so injured! Why he looked like he'd been homeless for the past few years! *Why he'd never returned, if things got this bad!!* Tenna wanted to help!! He could've helped!! All Spam had to do was *tell* him!

But Tenna knew that getting an answer from Spamton was about as common as turning back time. Answers were a resource Spamton didn't have to hand. It was infuriating. It was stressful. It made this situation so much more difficult.

"Spamton." Tenna spoke at last, taking a step forward.

Spamton jumped, though his gaze remained fixed on Tenna.

"Te-Tenna." Spam replied, as though his voice wasn't shaking from more than just his stutter. *God*, his voice sounded raspy. He hadn't given up smoking, clearly. "I-I-I'm surprised y-you came."

“I’m surprised, too.” Tenna muttered, “Don’t know why I bothered.”

Spamton looked away, hands fidgeting, brow narrowed.

“W-W-W-” He sighed, shaking his head harshly before continuing, “Why *did* yo-you?”

Tenna paused. Why did he? Because he was hopeful. He was a stupid old man with endless optimism who didn’t know when to quit, and he found a sliver of light in hoping. Because burning from hope was better than being in the dark.

“Because you *left*, Samson.” Tenna hissed, finding some sort of twisted joy at the way the other man flinched at the name, “You left, with no warning and no note, and then didn’t get in contact for *ten years*. Forgive me for–”

“A-And four months.” Spam’s voice interjected.

“...What?”

“Ten y-y-years. An-And four m-months. Tha-That’s h-how long I-I-I-I-” Spamton made a noise of frustration that vaguely resembled a growl, “I w-was gone f-f-for. C-Counted every day i-in hopes I’d get to c-c-come back.”

Tenna noted how bad Spam’s stutter was. In all of the years of knowing him, Spam’s stutter had never been this strong. Then again, Spamton *had* always hated confined spaces, or any space where an immediate exit wasn’t visible. And there was also the fact that he’d been gone for ten years and four months. That likely had something to do with it.

A silence hung in the air for a moment. It wasn’t comfortable, but they let it sit. Spamton didn’t look up from his fidgeting hands. Tenna turned his gaze to the miserable weather outside. He’d missed it by mere minutes.

Tenna was the one to break the silence.

“I counted, too. Counted the days, hoping for word from you. But it never came.” Tenna’s voice was barely above a whisper. “I tried to contact Queen, but she just gave me a vague ‘He’s Just Samson!’ as if that was any comfort.”

Spamton took to biting his lip. Tenna noted how raw they were. It deepened his frown.

“Ramb’s not going to believe I found you.” Tenna let out a dry chuckle, running a hand over his hair exasperatedly. “Nor are Elnina and Lanino. And they aren’t going to be happy I came.”

“I-I miss them.”

Tenna sighed. It was a weary sigh–the kind that’s been caring your emotions for days upon days, waiting for the moment you reach your destination. It held back a sob with a thread the thickness of a grain of sand. Or maybe it was a laugh. Tenna didn’t know.

“You missed your chance to have them miss you.” Tenna finally looked back over at Spamton and narrowed his cold glare when he made eye contact with the other. “*Why*?” Tenna accused, “Why did you go??”

“I didn’t–”

“Have a choice, yes I know. I’ve heard that one before.” Tenna hissed.

“I c-c-can’t tell you, Ten-Tenna. I w-w-wish I c-could. I wanted to st-st-stay so, *so* badly. I’m tired of y-you believing I d-don’t give a damn, when I g-give more of a d-damn than you r-r-realise.” Spamton’s voice had a slight note of irritation as he leaned towards Tenna, expression twisted into something sad. Pitiful. “C-Can we j-just talk about so-something different for now? S-Something not related to things I-I-I can’t d-disclose?”

Tenna huffed an irritated sigh.

“Fine.” He snapped, “You’re coming back with me. The doctors told me you can’t be on your own for two weeks, so I guess either I’m staying here for two weeks with you, or you’re getting on a flight with me back to California.”

Spamton shuffled where he sat, fighting the urge to look away. Tenna tried to discern the emotion Spam was feeling, but the other man was just too good at hiding it.

“What happened, anyway? And I don’t just mean with the hospital. Why do you look like that?? Is this some Big Shot trend??” Tenna half mocked. He rolled his eyes, resting a hand on a hip as he stared down Spamton.

“T-Tens—“ Spam began, but Tenna cut him off.

“Tenna.” Tenna corrected, “Or Ant. Anthony. You lost the right to call me nicknames when you left.”

“Tenna.” Spam amended, “I don’t… r-really know how I-I ended up h-here. In the hospital, I m-mean. I guess I… Had an ep-episode? H-H-Hallucinations, ‘n all th-th-that jazz. Some g-guy found me ‘n took p-p-pity, I su-suppose.”

“Okay but, *why??* If you were having a psychotic episode, surely someone at your job or something could’ve helped? Don’t you live in an apartment or something??” Tenna argued.

“Tenna, I…” Spam began, wincing, “I-I’m h-homeless. I don’t l-look like this by choice, y’know.”

All Tenna could do was stand there in shock. Homeless? Did he just… This whole…? Why didn’t he—??

“C-Couldnt come back b-b-b-because of t-the deal. Couldn’t st-stay because of the contract. H-Had nowhere t-t-to go because I was—“ Spamton cut himself off abruptly, shaking his head, “D-Doesn’t matter. P-Point is, not my ch-choice. G-Guess that means I-I’m finally

coming back home. Y-Y-You can't stay with m-me because I-I don't have anywhere *t-to* stay. Y-You could just… Leave m-me here, t-t-though. I've got a d-decent spot. Not too—"

"You're coming with me." Tenna interrupted, against his better judgment, "You're coming home with me, to California, and you're apologising. And goddammit if I'm not getting any answers out of you. You're telling all you can. And in return, I'll help you recover. Get you back on your feet."

Because I hate seeing you like this, Spam. Is what Tenna didn't add. *Because seeing you hurting feels like knives, and it's worse than finding out you just left to be rich without us.*

Spamton didn't respond immediately. He looked stunned, but years on the streets (and the pressure of a nurse looming near the room) taught him to not pass an opportunity like this up.

"O-Okay. F-F-Fine. I'll come w-with you." Spamton relented, as though he had a say in the matter. Spamton was always going to agree. He missed Tenna more than he could put into words.

"But," Tenna interjected, "You have to swear you'll try to answer questions. Swear you won't just run again. Because I can only help if you cooperate, Spamton."

Spamton nodded frantically, gathering a worn looking cane Tenna had only just noticed before answering, "Yes— Y-Y-Yeah, I-I'll try m-my best, T— Ten-Tenna."

And so, Spamton scrambled off the bed, wincing as something in his ankle twisted uncomfortably. His knee clicked as he walked, and a limp was pronounced as he scrambled to catch up to Tenna. Tenna tried not to notice him tremble, and Spam did his best to keep pace, despite the difference in height and physical capabilities. They had a long way to go, but this was a good first step.

Chapter End Notes

AHH TYSM FOR THE SUPPORT SO FAR!!! YOU GUYS ARE WONDERFUL!!!!!

I'm so glad you're enjoing this!!!! This fic is my baby atm, it's very special to me. I hope you're enjoying the angst, because it's gonna be staying :33

I have a discord server for my fics by the way!!!! Here's the link:

https://discord.gg/78rmgQ92Xv

Chapter 3: Just Like Old Times

Chapter Summary

Spamton and Tenna arrive at the hotel, and Spamton remembers.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The drive was… intense, to say the least.

Spamton sat awkwardly in the passenger seat, fidgeting with his hands nervously. He looked like a scared shelter cat being taken home for the first time. If Tenna wasn't so mad at him, it would be endearing. Tenna sat in silence, with only the faint noise of the radio keeping him company. Occasionally, the car would go over a bump or a shallow pothole, and Spamton would wince sharply. Tenna wanted to say something–ask if he was okay, or offer assistance–but his frustration won out.

Tenna was still mulling over their conversation as they drove, thinking over words left unsaid, and words he wished he'd left alone. Really, he should've just gone back home… Now he was stuck in New York for the day with his ex, who had been *homeless* for at LEAST a year, very much likely longer. The state Spamton was in tugged at Tenna's heart in uncomfortable ways. He needed to call his therapist and schedule an appointment as soon as Spam was settled.

God, how was he even going to get Spamton back home?! His flight was already booked! He'd have to shell out the cost of another ticket… Ramb was going to think he was impulse buying out of a hope that Spam would be there. Well, egg on his face, Spam was sitting next to him!

Spam was…

He was sitting next to him.

He was here. After years. He was *here*. Years of being missing. He was just… sat next to him.

Tenna almost missed a stop light in his contemplation. The sudden jolt of the vehicle made Spamton make a sound of alarm, which quickly turned into a scary-sounding coughing fit. Honestly, Tenna was surprised he didn't see Spam cough up blood! The former mailman soon recovered, returning to his stance of looking out of the window with a blank expression and folded arms. Tenna realised that Spam was unusually tense. It was… almost disturbing? When Tenna had known Spamton before, He'd known Spam as a loose, easygoing guy with an ego the size of a planet. He was never tense or still, always rambling about some new big idea about how they were going to make it big! This Spamton felt like a completely different person! Logically, he knew this made sense. Time had passed. They were both different now. Tenna just hoped he hadn't lost his friend somewhere along the way.

X

Spamton didn't realise that they'd arrived at the hotel until Tenna said his name with such a gentleness that it almost made him shed a tear. Gentleness was not commonplace for Spam to experience nowadays. He was used to the rough. The cold. The snow against thin clothing and scorching sun on pale skin. The scathing comments and sideways glances. Spamton knew how he looked. He knew his position. Tenna breaking him from his thoughts about how the skyline looked like stardust when seen from this angle with a gentle word? His own name was enough to make him realise that, despite everything, Tenna was still himself. He still took pity on the little guy. Literally. He still cared, despite the odds.

Spam didn't notice he was trembling until he took his cane, and it shook with him. Whether Tenna noticed or not, he didn't say anything, however he did keep a hand hovering in the air, just in case Spam fell. He was able to get out of the car relatively without fault, with the exception being the way he almost immediately tripped on the pavement. But even after leaving, Spam wanted to return to the car's cocoon of safety. It was the fact that it was a warm environment that kept Spam wanting to stay. He didn't want to leave the vehicle's comfort, or the way it could show the city as something beautiful, instead of something sharp and full of pain.

Outside of the car reminded him how the cold stung, and how the people ignored him like they ignored everything else. Being in front of this hotel reminded him of how much he'd lost. Standing next to Tenna reminded him of who he'd lost.

He wanted to go back inside.

But Tenna was already paces ahead of him, adjusting his cardigan to buffet against the cold. Spam scurried after him with an edge of anxiety, frantic to not be left behind. He was grateful, for once, for the lingering pain. It grounded him in reality. He was here. This wasn't a dream. Tenna really had come to save him. And he would be safe and warm soon.

The hotel itself wasn't that fancy. It was a generic New York hotel with white walls, a fake marble counter, and cheap yet plush seats. It felt like a five-star resort to Spamton. Tenna visibly didn't particularly like this place and its tacky lobby with four TVs, all showing the same thing but at slightly delayed intervals, but it would do. It was the closest place to the airport and the hospital that Spamton had been at, all without costing a fortune. Spamton really didn't care about how fancy it was, or how expensive it had been. He was just looking forward to sleeping somewhere that wasn't concrete or cardboard.

The first issue arose when Spamton tried to hurry into the hotel after Tenna before the door shut, and then proceeded to linger slightly behind him with an expression of paranoia and worry. It didn't exactly scream trustworthy. If anything, it looked like he was trying to pickpocket Tenna. So when a man in a crisp suit, wearing a cold expression, approached him, Spamton grabbed the hem of Tenna's jacket, despite himself.

"Sir, you can't be in here." The man began, stern and unfeeling. It reminded Spam of Queen's "Swatchlings". The same ones who had caused his accident. Spamton wasn't exactly relaxed by his presence. "This is for residents only. Please leave."

Spamton, trembling from both cold and fear, looked up at Tenna, tugging at his jacket nervously. Tenna was mid-conversation-slash-argument with the receptionist about his booking, when the tug pulled him away. Irritation flooded his soft features for a moment, assuming Spam was tugging at his jacket for some foolish reason, before his attention was snatched by the words of the guard.

“Oh, he’s with me.” Tenna assured, “He’s a resident, I can promise you that! We’re just booking in, so if you’ll excuse us…”

Tenna, despite not being done arguing the logistics of… something Spam hadn’t paid attention to, grabbed his key card, took Spamton’s shaky hand, and lead him to the elevator as if they were just a perfectly normal couple. The guard gave a hurried apology as the scene unfolded, buying into Tenna’s false niceties. From this angle, Spam could see Tenna’s slight embarrassment and frustration taking over from politeness, fuelled by his strong dislike of people’s ignorance.

“I just *cannot* stand when people assume things!” Tenna huffed, folding his arms dramatically, “Are you okay, Spam? No injuries?”

Spamton’s pale face flushed at the nickname, but he shook his head. No additional injuries other than the ones he’d had previously.

“I-I’m fine, Ant. D-Don’t need t-t-to worry about m-me.”

Tenna didn’t say anything more, but his expression told Spamton that he strongly disagreed with this statement. Instead of pursuing his disagreement, Tenna stepped into the elevator and changed the subject, switching his worried frown for a slightly irritated one.

“Once we get to my room, you’re taking a shower. You smell like trash.” Tenna huffed, scrunching his nose for emphasis.

Spam allowed himself a moment of humor and smiled, borrowing a memory of his former salesman personality.

“W-What? Don’t like m-my h-h-homemade Big Shot col-cologne?”

“I don’t think I’ve ever liked your cologne.”

Spamton's shaky smile became a confused frown rather abruptly.

"What?? Y-You said you l-loved it??"

"I lied, Spam. Like most people did." Tenna teased. It was warm. Familiar. Spamton didn't want to let it go. "I think the only person who liked it was you. It smelled expensive, and not in a good way."

Spam opened his mouth to speak, folding his arms indignantly, but a stutter caught him in a loop of "i"'s. Instead, he huffed, muttered, "I th-th-thought it smelled *g-great*.", and allowed the subject to rest. Albeit with some indignantly.

The "argument" was resolved at that, with the elevator reaching their floor, and Tenna taking the lead so he could find the room he was staying in. Spamton couldn't help but feel self-conscious walking the halls of a place occupied by families here to visit, or businesspeople here for meetings. It had been years since he'd been in a hotel for a meeting away from home. It had been even longer since he'd stayed in a hotel like this! Despite the paranoia threatening to overwhelm him, Spam felt safe in the presence of Tenna. He still trusted him, despite how misguided he knew that trust could end up.

The hotel room was… fairly basic, all things considered. It had a double bed against the left wall, with a TV in front of it, and a closet to the left. The bathroom sat down a slight corridor, closer to the exit, and was set with rather fancy looking amenities. Further down the corridor, just past the bed, sat a wall that cut off to separate an almost observatory-esque area, where a chaise lounge rested against a window. There was a mini kitchen, a plush armchair, and a few other counters and cabinets that brought the room together, but other than that, it was fairly standard. One issue Spam did notice, though, was that there was only one bed.

"Sorry about the bed, Spamton. That's what I was arguing about downstairs." Tenna apologised, shrugging off his jacket, "I tried to ask for a separate bed, but I suppose one of us is just going to have to take the couch–"

"I'll take it." Spam interrupted, "I-It's fine, I pro-probably won't sleep w-w-well on a bed, a-anyway."

“Are you sure, Spam?” Tenna pressed, “I mean, you *did* just get out of the hospital. Don’t you want to sleep on something comfortable??”

“Ten-Tenna, ev-even *before* I was h-homeless, I could s-s-sleep anywhere, y-you of all people sh-sh-should know this.” Spam assured, “D-D-D-Do you remember th-that time I f-fell asleep m-mid pitch?”

“Standing up? Yes, I recall it.” Tenna’s voice was laced with distaste, “It was *freaky*!”

Spamton let out a cackle, which quickly turned into a coughing fit. Tenna flinched.

“Go take a shower, Spamton. I’ll leave some spare clothes out for you. We can buy some that will better fit you tomorrow. In the meantime, I should have a shirt that won’t dwarf you somewhere…” Tenna half-rambled, turning to the closet behind him. Spamton tried to not look too excited at being clean, but the way he hurried down the corridor, almost abandoning his cane, kind of gave it away.

Spam was never a very public person. He was always quiet and reserved about his personal life. It helped that he was good at keeping secrets. He knew how and when to keep his mouth shut, especially in important places, like work, or business deals. Tenna was not usually someone Spamton was private around. He was Spamton’s closest friend, and almost lover. They had been joined at the hip, perfectly syncing, which was perfect for live TV, but it also meant there wasn’t much they hid from one another.

Spamton was hiding a lot from Tenna now. Mainly, just how much he’d lost all of those years ago. Of course, it was easy to tell he’d lost his home, his job, and even a few fingers, but what it wasn’t easy to tell, was that he had also lost his leg. Almost eight years ago, Spamton had been on the cusp of everything he wanted, finally in Queen’s mansion with a booming sales career and a mystery benefactor, when everything fell. Sales had taken a drop, his career was failing, and his benefactor was silent on the other end of the phone.

He had tried to save Tenna too hard.

But whilst his benefactor had taken all it had given, that wasn't all that would happen. See, Queen didn't like people who weren't profitable. If they weren't helping or being useful in some capacity, they lost the privilege of living in her mansion. Spamton thought he would be safe, considering he was still earning enough to pay rent. But an "accident" with a couple swatchlings, a badly timed slip, and a faulty stage light left Spam with medical debt, no home, and no right leg just above the knee.

He'd tried to save himself by pushing the light away once it had fallen, but that had just electrocuted his hands, leading to the scars and missing pinky finger. The missing middle finger came later, once he'd been on the streets for a while. Hypothermia was no joke. But for eight years, the main thing he'd had to save for was medical expenses. Making sure his injuries healed semi-decently, making sure his scuffed prosthetic still worked well enough, and making sure his cane didn't completely fall apart. It was a struggle, but Spam had managed.

But he couldn't tell Tenna. He couldn't worry the man who had already somehow taken pity on him. Spam didn't understand why Tenna was being so generous. He assumed it was just foolish, misguided faith in the little guy, but Spamton was starting to think Tenna was just genuinely optimistic things would go back to how they were. They both knew that couldn't happen, but Spamton would be lying if he said he hadn't at least hoped Tenna would greet him with open arms.

Once Spamton was washed and dry, he left the bathroom in a few towels, all toasty from the towel rail. Spam almost *melted* in the bathroom from the comfort of it all, but the slight draft from the thin walls and slightly broken window latch immediately jolted Spamton back to reality. Tenna was gone when Spamton was done, but a note on a pile of clothes outside the bathroom informed him that Tenna was just out buying food. That reminded Spam of how hungry he was… No matter, he could steal something from the cupboard later when Tenna was asleep. In the meantime, Spamton changed into the clothes provided and felt only a *little* awkward with how much they dwarfed him. He was too fixated on the fact that they smelled like his former business partner…

Spamton shook his head, and his freshly washed hair flopped in front of his eyes pathetically. Best not to dwell on his old life. He wasn't getting it back any time soon. So instead, Spamton resigned to the couch, and decided to wait out Tenna's return with a well-earned nap.

Chapter End Notes

I HOPE YOU LIKED THIS CHAPTER!!!!!! It was very fun to write :33 I know I've had a semi-consistent upload schedule thus far, but that's likely gonna change considering I'm gonna be busy. Apologies!!!!!!!

Chapter 4: Mundane

Chapter Summary

When Spamton awoke, it was to the smell of food. Pasta, he guessed.

Tenna cooks food, and Spamton regrets agreeing to go out.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Spamton awoke, it was to the smell of food. Pasta, he guessed. At first, Spam just assumed a new food vendor had set up near his usual spot, or someone was standing nearby whilst they finished their food. But when Spam pushed himself back, out of the way and hidden, his palm touched soft, warm fabric, still cosy from where his body had been. He didn't cut his palm on loose glass, or brush against flattened cardboard. He was safe and warm in a hotel room, with his former partner in the kitchenette, cooking pasta.

Spamton rubbed his eyes tiredly, jaw clicking as he yawned. He stretched for a moment, feeling his joints pop and click in a rather concerning fashion. Nevermind, Spam knew how weird his body was. These were… likely normal sounds. Once he had woken up a bit, he checked his prosthetic was on correctly, mentally scolded himself for sleeping with it on, and got up to see what Tenna was making. Spamton's hair, usually a greasy mess, flopped down into his eyes, causing much irritation. He now recalled why he'd loved having it gelled back so much. Now it was washed, soft, and massively skewed from sleep, his hair could freely fall into his eyes. Irritating.

Spamton's prosthetic creaked as he approached the kitchen, signalling to Tenna that he was no longer alone. Tenna whipped around, almost spilling pasta sauce in his haste. A smile crossed his features briefly, before he caught himself, and the beaming smile became a patient one. Spam, still bleary from sleep, shot Tenna a wobbly smile as he leaned against the counter, peering over the pot to see what was cooking. Pasta, just as he suspected. Nothing fancy, just fusilli with tomato sauce, but, like everything Tenna was doing for him, it felt like a luxury.

“G’morning, Spamton.” Tenna greeted, “You looked like you needed that sleep, so I just left you alone.”

Spamton grumbled something quietly, shifting his weight slightly. He made an effort to try and push his hair out of his eyes, but his hair was not budging. Any angle he shoved it, it would just fall back down anyway. It was getting on his nerves.

“We’re going out to buy clothes later, so I left a change of clothes on that chair.” Tenna gestured vaguely to somewhere behind him. Spamton caught sight of the armchair, and true to his word, there was another button-up, a sweater, some slacks, and some shoes that looked ever slightly too small for Tenna. Still incredibly oversized for Spamton’s much smaller frame. But… wait, Spamton only intended to nap. Weren’t they going shopping *tomorrow*?

“L-Later?” Spam asked, rubbing his eyes.

“Yep!” Tenna confirmed, “You slept through the night! Weirdly sound, might I add. I remember you being a light sleeper… At least, somewhat.”

Spam facepalmed, groaning as the tiredness began to wear off slightly.

“‘C-Course I did.” He muttered, “I’ll g-go get ready.”

As Spamton turned to leave, a thought occurred to him, and it stopped him in his tracks. Turning around slowly, Spam called,

“So… W-Why are you ma-making pasta for b-breakfast??”

“Because it was all I had…” Tenna mumbled, looking away sheepishly, “And besides, this is from my dinner yesterday. Everything was extortionately expensive at the store, and I had the mindset that I was cooking for one. Forgot you’re oh-so picky.” He teased. Spamton scowled.

In the lull of conversation, Spam turned away to change, heading for the armchair.

Spamton was right. The clothes were WAY too big for him. What did he expect?! Tenna was freakishly six-foot-one-million, apparently, and Spamton was only a hell of a lot shorter. He liked to say he was five-five, but anyone who was actually five-five could shut down his argument instantly. Safe to say, Spamton felt slightly humiliated in Tenna's clothes, but it was much better than wearing his threadbare jacket and dirty turtleneck. Granted, he was definitely sad to see them go… They reminded him so much of his big shot days! But clean clothes? Definitely an improvement.

After eating some of the breakfast pasta Tenna had cooked, Spamton put his old shoes on to prevent him from tripping and breaking more bones. As much as he appreciated Tenna's gesture, if the clothes were this big on him, he shuddered to think what the shoes would be like. After dutifully ignoring the way his wrist ached as he fixed the splint, Spamton sauntered back into the kitchen, where a pleasantly distracted Ant Tenna was waiting. He seemed to be reading some kind of magazine, flipping through the pages with reserved interest whilst he waited for Spam. Once he heard Spam's flats on the wood floor and the tell-tale wheeze of his rattling lungs, Tenna smiled, put the magazine down, and got up with an enthusiastic, "So! Are you ready to go?"

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The drive to the shopping mall was only mildly less tense than the drive to the hotel. It seemed Spamton was reluctant to be trapped in a confined space for extended periods of time, especially when trapped with Tenna. Ordinarily, Tenna would be a pillar of immense comfort. This wasn't ordinary in the slightest. Spamton *hated* the fact that this meant he couldn't easily escape. He was stuck in this moving vehicle with someone who could ask him anything or do anything and he'd have no escape.

It didn't help that Spamton wasn't looking forward to going to the mall, either. He was terrified of the potential of seeing crowds of people, and to make matters worse, he could see someone who would *recognise* him. Granted, in his current state with his emaciated frame, scraggly stubble, cracked glasses and too-long hair, it was a shocker even Tenna had recognised him. But it was a risk Spamton was unwilling to take. But it wasn't up to Spamton. He knew the terms of having a safe place to sleep. He'd been in a position of doing whatever it took to get a bed or, hell, even a couch to sleep on, before. If Tenna said that's where they were going, he wasn't going to argue.

It was cold out, as they arrived at their destination. Tenna pulled a scarf around his neck and adjusted his thick-framed glasses as they got out of the vehicle, shivering slightly as he did so. Spamton just pulled the oversized cardigan Tenna had given him around him tighter, and tried to ignore the uncomfortable paranoia that crept along his shoulders. It was one thing to be with Tenna, off the streets yet with someone he couldn't quite trust. It was another to be in *public*, surrounded by people he *definitely* couldn't trust.

Spamton tried to ignore the way his leg throbbed uncomfortably, a side effect of sleeping with his prosthetic on. He knew how idiotic this was, especially considering his pain had already been pretty damn bad, but he didn't trust Tenna to that degree yet. He had no idea how the other man would react to knowing just how messed up Spam actually was. Despite knowing Tenna better than anyone, Spamton couldn't help but lean into the worry that Tenna would be disgusted by who he'd become if he knew the extent of it…

But there was no use dwelling on it now, Tenna was already racing ahead, as per usual. Spamton limped after him as fast as he could, calling out in alarm as he almost tripped over a crack he didn't see. Tenna seemed excited about this adventure, and whilst Spamton definitely couldn't say the same, he couldn't help but admit that being out with Tenna again, doing something so mundane, certainly was a nice break. Well, as nice as a shopping mall could be.

That nicety didn't last.

Wow, Spam forgot how crowded these places could be. There were people *everywhere*, all bustling about loudly, pushing and shoving as they got their shopping finished. It reminded Spamton of when he'd lived closer to the centre of New York, at the height of his career. He missed the bustle of it all, when he felt so *important*, despite everyone elses ignorance. Because despite the public and their hostility, Spamton need only look at a billboard to remember that he *was* popular. He *did* matter. He was a shark in this ecosystem. They were all merely fishes.

Now, Spam felt akin to the lowest of the low, all the way at the bottom of the food chain. The crowds could buffer him, pushing him back and forth like a raging tide. Even with Tenna clearing a path, keeping up hurt so much, he kept getting pushed away. Relief from the constant battle only came once Tenna dipped into a store, taking Spam with him.

It was much quieter here. The store wasn't nearly as bustling as the mall outside, but that didn't make it devoid of people. An uncomfortable patter of footsteps still invaded Spamton's conscience like ants. The hum of low conversation felt louder than the stiflingly calm music that echoed throughout the space, and it took all of Spamton's willpower to not start muttering to himself. Hearing his own insane ramblings was better than the grating tune of conversation.

Much to his chagrin, Spamton found that after entering this particular store–an oddly famillar store, might he add–, Tenna had left him. Well, not exactly. But he had wantered off somewhere, leaving Spam alone to look by himself. How Tenna trusted Spam enough that he knew the smaller man wouldn't flee was beyond him. Though he supposed the logic of a hatred of people was enough to trust that Spam would rather do this than face the crowds outside.

So, Spam set off on his search of the store.

Despite being told more than once that this was for him, and therefore he had express permission to buy whatever he liked, Spamton was incredibly hesitant to even look at anything. He deemed it best to keep to himself, only considering an item if it really piqued his interest. But this store? It… Well, it clearly wasn't intended to have people like Spamton inside. The price tags were intimidating, and the items seemed… impractical. Granted, Spam used to be the kind of person to value fashion over practicality, but years of living rough gave him a newfound respect for a durable, warm coat.

The first item to catch his attention was a cardigan.

If you'd asked Spamton from ten years ago if he'd ever wear a cardigan, he'd swear down he'd never be caught dead in one, but this Spamton was old and tired. He'd earned his cardigan rights. Tenna had looked pretty… *nice*, in that cardigan the other day… Besides, it was cold. He was allowed one nice thing after all of this. He could enjoy one luxury, even if it did feel slightly emasculating to his incredibly destroyed ego.

Still no sign of Tenna, even as Spamton continued to peruse the cardigans. He'd decided to pick up the cardigan he'd taken a liking to, just in case Tenna decided to return from the depths of wherever he'd disappeared to. Spam moved on to shirts, perusing the selection of button ups and t-shirts alike. Spamton, when in private, had always liked a simple t-shirt. They were something comfortable he could slip into once the day was over. Something that

didn't require buttons, or focus to put on. And besides, he spent most of the day in clothes that made him professional and chic. Comfort was earned by the end.

Spamton briefly considered how far he'd fallen, much to his own dislike. He had to dwell on it at some point, scrounging the back aisle of a store as though he was going to be kicked out at any moment. He was wearing an oversized cardigan, with an equally oversized shirt, and torn dress pants that were definitely overdue a wash. His shoes had amassed so many holes they could probably be considered sandals, and his hair was so long and scraggly, it could easily be tied up with a hairband. This was nothing even remotely close to Spamton at his prime, no matter how much he begged to deny it.

Spamton hugged the cardigan in his arms closer to him as he moved on, browsing more t-shirts in his effort to ignore his dread. He got some humor out of finding a TV time shirt in his size in the "vintage" section, and found some decently comfortable looking pants that he didn't feel too bad picking up. The prices still loomed in the back of his mind, but he found that if he told them to shut up hard enough, he could fake this being normal. He could just shop, without his lack of funds hanging over his head.

And Spamton refused to consider how he was paying for these, because even with the dread of bankruptcy, for some reason, the idea of help was more daunting to him. The idea of getting outside help with his money, even from someone as trusted as Tenna, felt worse to him than the idea that he couldn't afford it. So instead, Spamton lied to himself, whispering that he just had help from his Benefactor! Who cares if it made the ringing ever louder?? The thought that this was just the return of his Benefactor took the edge off of help. And it took the edge off of knowing Tenna was here… *somewhere.*

Spamton sighed, feeling the rattle of air in his lungs as he limped around an aisle. Tenna was, unsurprisingly, still nowhere to be seen. It was starting to worry Spamton. Tenna was tall, and he was loud. He wasn't exactly the best at hiding. So where had the man gone??

Spamton headed down an aisle of coats, skimming half-heartedly, all whilst not particularly paying attention. He didn't find anything that piqued his interest, though that was mainly because he was too busy being stressed that he couldn't find Ant. Where was he?? Spamton was about five minutes away from heading to the front of the store to report a missing old man, when something different caught his eye.

Something familiar.

Something– No, some*one*– achingly, painfully, *painstakingly* familiar. Spamton sucked in a sharp breath, freezing as he realised why this store was so familiar.

He knew who was at the end of this aisle, talking to an employee casually about something Spam couldn’t quite make out. It was someone Spam would really rather not see him like this, because *pity* was something Spam hated more than the situation itself.

His brother.

Chapter End Notes

AUGHHH I'M SO SORRY IT TOOK ME SO LONG TO WRITE THIS-- I hope the wait was worth it lmao. I had fun writing this.

This chapter is dedicated to my best friend, you know who you are. You are these goobers' biggest fans.

Oooooohhhhhh, Spam's brother,, Grinning evilly. Spam's brother is too pitying, and whilst it comes from a good place, Spam definitely doesn't see it like that.

Next chapter SHOULD HOPEFULLY come out sooner lmao. I am SO sorry goobers. Tysm for your patience.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!